

VZCZCXRO3628
PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK
DE RUEHGB #1571/01 1331746
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 131746Z MAY 07
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1127
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 001571

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/10/2017
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PTER](#) [KDEM](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: PRT TIKRIT: SAMARRA'S POLITICAL LEADERSHIP
STRUGGLING AMIDST DETERIORATING SECURITY

REF: BAGHDAD 969

Classified By: PRT Lead Steven R. Buckler for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (U) This is a PRT Tikrit, Salah ad Din cable. It has been cleared by the 3rd Brigade of the 82nd Airborne Division (3/82) Brigade Combat Team (BCT), which is the Coalition Forces (CF) task force with responsibility for the province of Salah ad Din (SaD).

¶2. (C) SUMMARY. Amidst a deteriorating security situation with the killing of the city's Police Chief on 6 May, Samarra's political leadership is struggling to stay afloat. While tribal dynamics define politics in Samarra, the provincial government has recently taken a greater role in supporting Samarra's political leadership. Al Qaeda in Iraq/The Islamic State of Iraq (AQI/ISI) continues to exploit pre-existing tribal tensions to foment violence and undermine efforts to maintain security in the city. The recent killing of the city's Police Chief underscores the spike in attacks over the past two months. Suspicions that the National Police (NP) coming to assist in securing the city and protect the Golden Dome Mosque during its reconstruction will be predominantly Shia have raised tensions, which National Police (NP) Battalion leader and Samarra native General Adnan Thabit will have to address before the NP's scheduled June/July arrival. END SUMMARY.

All Politics Are Local and Tribal

¶3. (C) Well-known for its enduring tribal tensions, Samarra and its politics are defined by tribal affiliations, and the deteriorating security situation has left the city's political leadership struggling to stay afloat. Reportedly for security reasons, City Council President (CCP) Asad Ali Yassin al Abasi moved in March 2006 to Baghdad, where he has strong political ties and has assumed an unknown position in the GOI. Recently a Deputy City Council President (DCCP), Mizhur Flayyih Hasan Muhammed al Abassi, was put in place through unknown means. While it appears that most provincial and city officials recognize him as the DCCP, he struggles to garner political influence. In a May 8 meeting, the Governor intimated that he may fire the city's current mayor, Mahmoud Khalaf Ahmed al Bazi, who is often absent from the city working on efforts to reconstruct the Golden Dome Mosque (AKA Ali al Hadi Shrine, al Askariya Shrine). Mayor Mahmoud has been the GOI and UNESCO's sole contact in Samarra on mosque reconstruction initiatives. In his place, the Governor said he may appoint Mohammed Abdullah Salih, reportedly a former Border Patrol. Ostensibly for security reasons, the City Council does not meet regularly. Many contacts report that political authority lies in the hands of tribal sheikhs and religious imams, and city officials generally lack influence outside their personal tribes. (reftel)

¶4. (C) With the PRT and BCT's encouragement, SaD Governor

Hamad Hamoud al Shakti al Qaisi and Deputy Governor Abdullah H. M. Ajabarah al Jabouri have recently made efforts to support the city's political leadership. On May 3, the Governor hosted a meeting in Tikrit to demonstrate his support for the city government. However, only the Mayor and a few city technocrats attended, with the tribal sheikhs, religious imams, and city council members notably absent. The Mayor's inability to assemble the city's key figures likely prompted the Governor to consider replacing the Mayor. (NOTE: The DCCP, who normally would have been present, was unable to attend for logistical reasons. END NOTE.)

15. (C) At the May 3 meeting, the Governor took a hard-line approach on establishing a functional city government so that "security and municipal services could return." He said that the provincial government would withhold city council members' salaries if they did not begin attending meetings and working for the city. Additionally, he said that unless the security situation in the city improved, no reconstruction projects would be done and the Samarra-budgeted money would be spent elsewhere in the province. The provincial leadership intends to hold a second meeting in the coming week, where they hope to ensure participation by tribal sheikhs and religious imams. Owing to the boycott of the 2005 elections, Samarra has no representation in the provincial government, and that has previously limited the Governor and Deputy Governor's sway in the city.

AQI/ISI in Samarra

16. (C) Al Qaeda in Iraq/The Islamic State of Iraq (AQI/ISI),
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which has been deepening its roots in the Samarra area since October 2006, has successfully exploited pre-existing tribal tensions to foment violence and undermine efforts to maintain security in the city. In the city's leading tribes, the al Badri have largely sided with AQI/ISI, and the al Abasi, though not pro-CF, have largely supported the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF). Disputes among other minor tribes also complicate the city's politics and security situation.

17. (C) Attacks in Samarra, against both the CF and ISF, significantly increased in March and April over the previous three months, likely in part due to the Baghdad Security Plan (septel). Of note, Samarra's Iraqi Police (IP) Chief, COL Jaleel, who was generally considered to be effective, was killed in a bombing at an IP station in Samarra on May 6. A curfew remains on the city.

The Coming National Police

18. (C) According to Mayor Mahmoud, the National Police (NP) who will be coming to Samarra to secure the Golden Dome Mosque reconstruction site in June/July are rumored to be predominately Shia and, in the Samarra mind, by extension associated with Shia militias. These perceptions, along with the Governor's reported comments during a May 6 visit to Samarra about the NP not being welcome in the city, have raised tensions in the city. While the NP battalions are to be under the direction of well-liked Samarra native General Adnan Thabit, most Samarra residents are extremely apprehensive about the NP's arrival. (COMMENT: The NP's success in securing the Golden Dome Mosque reconstruction site and in helping maintain security in the city will largely depend on General Adnan's leadership and direct engagement. END COMMENT.)

Comment

¶9. (C) Mayor Mahmoud has been the only Samarra official engaged on the Golden Dome Mosque reconstruction project and in regular contact General Adnan Thabit and UNESCO. The Governor's consideration to replace him, if legally possible, with a former Border Patrol may be an attempt to put a stronger security figure in the center of Samarra's political structure. With AQI/ISI active in the area and with the coming attention related to the reconstruction of the Golden Dome Mosque, the provincial government's leadership in supporting Samarra's political leaders will be crucial. The PRT and BCT will continue to facilitate the provincial government in taking a positive, constructive role in Samarra. END COMMENT.

¶10. (U) For additional reporting from PRT Tikrit, Salah ad Din, please see our SIPRNET Reporting Blog:
<http://www.intelink.sgov.gov/wiki/Tikrit>.
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